

# FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ♦ Office of Multifamily Housing Programs

*Delivering Technology Access to America's Communities*

## Developing Neighborhood Networks Programs for Rural Centers

**A**lthough the gap has narrowed in recent years, Americans living in rural areas still lag slightly behind the national average in computer and Internet access and face challenges in moving to self-sufficiency because of a lack of available transportation, education, healthcare, and childcare choices.<sup>1</sup>

Neighborhood Networks centers located in rural communities can help alleviate these problems by identifying needs and providing services specific to their situation.

### Access to healthcare

Small populations in rural areas have difficulty supporting hospitals and retaining qualified doctors, which limits residents' access to healthcare. Lack of resources and transportation further compound the problem. By providing health services at Neighborhood Networks centers, including health education, healthy living courses, and blood pressure and cholesterol screenings, centers can contribute to rural communities. Potential partners include local hospitals, doctors, health departments, and other healthcare professionals. The Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Rural Health Policy ([www.ruralhealth.hrsa.gov](http://www.ruralhealth.hrsa.gov)) and the Rural Information Center Health Services ([www.nal.usda.gov/ric/richs](http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/richs)) offer more information and ideas on improving rural healthcare.

### Community centers

Neighborhood Networks centers can provide opportunities for people to come together as a community and channel their energies into creative projects. Activities like hosting potlucks, painting classrooms, planting community gardens, or organizing volunteers in projects can bring community members together.

### Youth programs

Neighborhood Networks centers can develop the potential of rural youth by providing after-school tutoring and other educational programs. Activities such as microenterprise programs, which help youth apply their energies to develop small business enterprises, offer a safe place to gather, socialize, and learn. Centers can give youth opportunities to contribute to their community and to others and can help connect struggling teens with adult mentors for support and guidance. In partnership with other community organizations, centers can open their doors to various community activities (such as health fairs, violence-prevention programs, and cultural events) designed to bring together parents, youth, and community residents. Information on establishing after-school programs and educational activities in rural areas is available at [www.afterschool.gov](http://www.afterschool.gov) and [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org).

### Transportation

Rural residents face unique circumstances that affect their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Compared with urban and suburban settings, rural communities often have



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<sup>1</sup> *Falling Through the Net*. U.S. Department of Commerce, October 2000.

fewer public transportation options.<sup>2</sup> As a result, individuals without reliable transportation may face difficulties traveling to and from work, appointments, and childcare. Neighborhood Networks centers can work with local agencies and organizations to develop and provide public and private transportation solutions to community members, such as organizing a van service to help those enrolled in workforce development training reach jobs.

## Childcare

Rural families experience unique childcare difficulties. Center-based care, increasingly popular among American families, is less available to rural children. In many areas, small and scattered populations and high transportation costs make childcare centers impractical. Neighborhood Networks centers can consider several approaches to meeting the rural childcare challenge:

- ◆ **Think broadly about partners.** Centers may want to look beyond the traditional childcare community. Partnerships may be possible with organizations working in areas such as economic development, transportation, and workforce development.
- ◆ **Create a coalition of small employers.** Although small employers may have limited resources to invest in childcare individually, their pooled resources can make a difference. They may be able to help support a childcare center or expand a network of family providers.
- ◆ **Look to resource and referral agencies to engage business partners.** In many states, resource and referral agencies are educating and offering services to businesses to promote family-friendly practices. See if they can help identify family-friendly businesses in the community.

2. *Transportation in Rural Communities: Strategies for Serving Welfare Participants and Low-Income Individuals*. Rural Policy Research Institute, April 2000.

For more information about programs and resources that can benefit rural communities, visit the following Web sites:

Community and Rural Development Institute,  
Cornell University  
[www.cardi.cornell.edu/objects/publications/index.cfm](http://www.cardi.cornell.edu/objects/publications/index.cfm)

Child Care Partnership Project  
<http://nccic.org/ccpartnerships>

National Rural Development Partnership  
[www.rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp)

Rural Empowerment Zone and Enterprise  
Community Program  
[www.ezec.gov](http://www.ezec.gov)

Rural Information Center  
[www.nal.usda.gov/ric](http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric)

## Neighborhood Networks Health Pilots

The goal of the Neighborhood Networks Health Initiative is to provide reliable health information and ensure that residents have improved access to healthcare services. Individuals who do not have unmet health needs are more likely to find and retain jobs.

To promote good health, HUD has assisted in the establishment of health pilot programs at eight centers around the nation.

These programs focus on primary care and on four specific health topics: prenatal and infant care, asthma, cardiovascular disease, and breast cancer. Lessons learned from these programs will be used to identify the center and community traits needed to support and sustain effective health pilot programs in other centers across the country.

